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Contemporary Authors

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**John Malcolm Brinnin****1916-1998****Nationality:** Canadian**Year of Birth:** 1916**Place of Birth:** Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada**Year of Death:** 1998**Genre(s):** Children's fiction, Poetry, Literary criticism and history, Social commentary, Biography**Table of Contents:**

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**Personal Information:** Family: Born September 13, 1916, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada; died June 26, 1998; brought to United States in 1920; son of John Thomas and Frances (Malcolm) Brinnin (American citizens). Education: Attended Wayne State University, 1936; University of Michigan, B.A., 1941; Harvard University, additional study, 1941-42. Memberships: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Signet Society.

**Education:** New Entry : 01/14/1999

**Career:** Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, instructor, 1942-47; Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, NY, associate editor, 1948-50; University of Connecticut, Storrs, associate professor of English, 1951-62; Boston University, Boston, MA, professor of English, 1961-78, professor emeritus, 1978-98. Poet-in-residence, Stephens College, 1947. Director, Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association's Poetry Center (New York, NY), 1949-56; U. S. State Department lecturer and delegate in Europe, 1954, 1956, and 1961.

**Award(s):**

Avery Hopwood Award, University of Michigan; Jeanette Sewell Davis Prize, *Poetry* magazine, 1939; Levinson Prize, 1943; received gold medal, Poetry Society of America, 1955, for distinguished service; Centennial Medal for distinction in literature, University of Michigan, 1963; National Institute of Arts and Letters grant, 1968.

## WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

### POEMS

- *The Garden Is Political*, Macmillan (New York City), 1942.
- *The Lincoln Lyrics*, New Directions (New York City), 1942.
- *No Arch, No Triumph*, Knopf (New York City), 1945.
- *The Sorrows of Cold Stone: Poems, 1940-1950*, Dodd (New York City), 1951, reprinted, Greenwood Press, 1971.
- *The Selected Poems of John Malcolm Brinnin*, Little, Brown (Boston), 1963.
- *Skin Diving in the Virgins and Other Poems*, Delacorte (New York City), 1970.

### OTHER

- *Dylan Thomas in America: An Intimate Journal*, Little, Brown, 1955, reprinted, 1971.
- *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World*, Little, Brown, 1959.
- *William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study*, University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis), 1961.
- *Arthur: The Dolphin Who Didn't See Venice* (juvenile), Little, Brown, 1961.
- *William Carlos Williams* (pamphlet), University of Minnesota Press, 1963.
- *The Sway of the Grand Saloon: A Social History of the North Atlantic*, Delacorte (New York City), 1972.
- *Sextet: T. S. Eliot and Truman Capote and Others*, Delacorte, 1981.
- *Beau Voyage: Life Aboard the Last Great Ships*, Congdon & Lattes (New York City), 1981.
- *Truman Capote: Dear Heart, Old Buddy*, Delacorte, 1986, published as *Truman Capote: A Memoir*, Sidgwick & Jackson (London), 1987.
- *Grand Luxe: The Transatlantic Style*, Holt (New York City), 1988.
- *Travel and the Sense of Wonder*, Library of Congress (Washington, DC), 1992.

### EDITOR

- (With Kimon Friar) *Modern Poetry: American and British*, Appleton (New York City), 1951.
- *A Casebook on Dylan Thomas*, Crowell (New York City), 1960.

- *Emily Dickinson: Poems*, Dell (New York City), 1960.
- (With Bill Read) *The Modern Poets: An American-British Anthology*, McGraw (New York City), 1963, 2nd edition, 1970.
- *Selected Operas and Plays of Gertrude Stein*, University of Pittsburgh Press (Pittsburgh), 1970.
- (With Read) *Twentieth Century Poetry, American and British (1900-1970): An American-British Anthology*, McGraw, 1971.

Contributor of numerous articles and stories to periodicals.

## "Sidelights"

"Although he is most deservedly known for his poetry, John Malcolm Brinnin's broad range of literary activities stamps him as a man of letters," according to Philip L. Gerber in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. "Besides producing six volumes of verse, he earned reputations as editor, anthologist, social historian, and literary biographer."

Discussing his philosophy of poetry, Brinnin wrote in *Poets on Poetry* that he was always "less interested in understanding a poem than in feeling it. What moved me then, as now, was the language and the music of language, the perception of the sheer poetic thing, without reference to the ideas which it is meant to serve or to promote. . . . In other words, poetry for me was, from the very beginning, not a vehicle, nor an agent, nor a means to salvation, but the liveliest art, the most gloriously useless and the most necessary."

Gerber pointed out that Brinnin as a poet has always shown an "interest in, and command of, form. . . . Although he is equally at home in the free-verse tradition . . . , Brinnin's free verse has never pretended to a spontaneous pouring-out of emotion on the page. Rather, his free verse is much like Eliot's, always tightly controlled, explicitly cadenced, and more often than not moving to the tune of sporadic unpatterned rhymes."

Reviewing *The Selected Poems of John Malcolm Brinnin* for *Library Journal*, B. W. Fuson noted: "Brinnin's range of experience and sensibility is amazing: these poems run the gamut from macabre to hilarious, savagely pessimistic to warmly sympathetic . . . , nostalgic to prophetic. . . . Brinnin's status as a major modern American poet should be more widely recognized." In a review of *Skin Diving in the Virgins and Other Poems*, P. H. Marvin in *Library Journal* described Brinnin as "one of the few poets who is perfectly predictable as to the high quality of each new volume. In a sense none of Brinnin's poems fail, for his style is distinguished, his mastery of his own poetic conventions is complete, and the limits he sets for himself are precise."

In two nonfiction books, *Dylan Thomas in America* and *Truman Capote: Dear Heart, Old Buddy*, Brinnin offers memoirs of two leading literary figures and personal friends. K. A. Porter wrote in the *New York Times* of Brinnin's *Dylan Thomas in America* that it is "a very honorable attempt to set [Brinnin's] share of the record straight." In doing so, Brinnin revealed much about Thomas's darker side, including his problems with alcohol. "It is a book of unusual frankness," as W. T. Scott noted in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*. "It is not so in any scandalous or malicious sense. It has, rather, an uncompromising, fierce honesty." Reviewing the memoir for *Nation*, M. L. Rosenthal summed up: "Brinnin's book is invaluable."

In *Truman Capote: Dear Heart, Old Buddy* Brinnin remembers his long friendship with novelist Capote in a memoir "delightful in its fund of anecdotal lore," as David Lehman in *Newsweek* stated. While Capote's own decline into alcoholism is only briefly described in the book, because the two friends saw less of each other during those years, the book does cover the earlier, more successful period in depth. "Brinnin's ability to think like a biographer, write like a novelist, and analyze like a critic," wrote Bernard F. Dick in *World Literature Today*, "has resulted in a reminiscence written with such grace and eloquence that it produces a dual reaction: one responds to it as one does to a novel, yet one reflects on it as one does on something that is undeniably true."

Gerber concluded: "Urbane, sophisticated, literate, witty, contemplative, formalist--any and all of these terms suit the talents of John Malcolm Brinnin, both in prose and in verse."

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### BOOKS

- *Contemporary Poets*, fifth edition, St. James Press (Detroit), 1991.
- *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 48: *American Poets, 1880-1945, Second Series*, Gale (Detroit), 1986.
- Nemerov, Howard, editor, *Poetry and Fiction*, Rutgers University Press, 1963.
- Nemerov, editor, *Poets on Poetry*, Basic Books, 1966.

### PERIODICALS

- *Atlantic*, January, 1956; December, 1971.
- *Best Sellers*, December 15, 1971.
- *Booklist*, December 15, 1955.
- *Book Week*, February 25, 1945, p. 4; October 27, 1963, p. 25.
- *Book World*, November 28, 1971, p. 9.
- *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, November 27, 1955, p. 4.
- *Christian Science Monitor*, June 6, 1963, p. 11; September 5, 1963, p. 11.
- *Horn Book*, October, 1963.
- *Kirkus*, January 15, 1945; September 15, 1955.
- *Library Journal*, October 15, 1955; August, 1963; July, 1970; January 15, 1972.
- *Music & Letters*, May, 1995, p. 314.

- *Nation*, August 1, 1942, p. 97; February 13, 1943; December 17, 1955.
- *New Republic*, March 29, 1943; April 2, 1945; November 13, 1971.
- *New Statesman*, September 27, 1963.
- *New Yorker*, November 27, 1971.
- *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, November 20, 1955, p. 1.
- *New York Times*, February 25, 1945, p. 10; July 22, 1951, p. 12; November 20, 1955, p. 5.
- *New York Times Book Review*, December 22, 1963, p. 4; January 9, 1972, p. 30.
- *Poetry*, February, 1943, pp. 622-626; April, 1945, pp. 32-35; March, 1972.
- *Prairie Schooner*, fall, 1974, pp. 201-221.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 11, 1981, pp. 6-7.
- *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 22, 1951, p. 17; November 27, 1955, p. 12.
- *Saturday Review*, November 19, 1955; February 1, 1964; January 29, 1972, p. 12.
- *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 24, 1945; December 29, 1951, p. 10.
- *Time*, January 3, 1972.
- *Times Literary Supplement*, August 4, 1972, p. 920.
- *U. S. Quarterly Booklist*, June, 1945.\*

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*. The Gale Group, 2000.

**Source Database:** Contemporary Authors

**PEN (Permanent Entry Number):** 0000012146

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